3: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1936) 1950 FL11 Luo FL11

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS OF THE LUO OF KENYA

E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD

THIS paper forms part of a short general account of the Luo based on a rapid survey made in 1936. The survey was financed by the Leverhulme Grants Committee. An earlier part, describing the political structure of the Luo, has recently appeared in another journal.[1]

Apart from information provided by Father Hartmann[2] and a fuller account by Mr. K. C. Shaw,[3] early accounts of Luo marriage are slight, and in some cases misleading. Mr. Shaw's account covers a good part of the ground covered by the present paper, but it is useful to have two independent accounts, especially as both were written from information obtained through interpreters. When I went to Kenya I did not expect to visit the Luo and I had not therefore read Mr. Shaw's article. Mr. Shaw and I disagree in a number of particulars in the overlapping parts of our papers. It does not follow from this that either of us is wrong in our statements because, as Mr. Shaw points out, there is some variation in local custom in the different tribes of Luoland. My own information on this particular subject was mostly obtained from the Alego tribe of Central Kavirondo. In the main I have followed the account given me by Pastor Ezekiel of that tribe. In doing so I have omitted much detail.

Simbo

Courtship and marriage are intimately connected with the custom of making love to girls (*yudo*) in the *simbo* or bachelors' dormitory, the hut nearest to the entrance to a Luo homestead. Youths arrange with girls to visit them there at night, and when a youth is visited by one of his sweethearts the other young men of the home sleep elsewhere. He plays with the girl and has intercourse between her thighs and they sleep together. He must not penetrate her—that is regarded as shameful, and it will be known on the day of her marriage. If a girl comes from a distance to visit her lover she may spend several nights with him in the *simbo*. A girl may have several lovers in different homesteads whom she visits from time to time; she pleases herself in these matters. The young men will not quarrel about her, nor will her father and brothers interfere in her love affairs. She may continue the practice throughout the stages of her marriage to another man right up to the *rim*, the final ceremony of marriage. I was told that a girl does not usually visit the *simbo* more often than once or twice a month. Occasionally the lover employs a harpist to entertain the girl and his friends on one of her visits, and there is singing and dancing. Between the songs youths, and sometimes girls also, stand up and boast of their virtues, of the number of their friends and sweethearts, of their wealth, and of their families and lineages; and when they have finished they throw a gift to the harpist, maybe to-day a shilling. Other youths then try to outdo them in boasts and generosity.

[1] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Luo Tribes and Clans', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 1949.

[2] H. Hartmann, 'Some Customs of the Luo (or Nilotic Kavirondo) living in South Kavirondo', *Anthropos*, 1908.

[3] K. C. Shaw, 'Some Preliminary Notes on Luo Marriage Customs', *J.R.A.I. & U.N.H.S.*, 1950.

5: Hobley G-5 (ca. 1900) 1903 FL11 Luo FL11

BRITISH EAST AFRICA.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES IN KAVIRONDO AND NANDI.

By C. W. Hobley, Assoc. M. Inst. C.E., and Assistant Deputy Commissioner, E.A. Protectorate.

[With Plates XXVIII–XXX.]

114 This paper contains the results of a more minute research into the habits and beliefs of the people already dealt with in a previous publication of the Institute.[1] The term Eastern Uganda, as applied to this area, is, however, no longer correct, as since the date of that publication, the Eastern Province of Uganda has been transferred, and is now known as the Kisumu Province of the East Africa Protectorate.

When compiling my former work, I had no idea that such an amount of material still remained to be recorded, and, consequently, I was equally surprised to find that so much more existed; I venture, therefore, to hope that my researches may furnish students of the science, who have no opportunity of visiting these countries, with some information worth their consideration.

The disappointing feature in researches of this nature, to the observer in the field, is that no reason is obtainable from the people themselves for the existence of many of their strange customs, but I have no doubt that anthropologists in Europe, with their advantages of a wide range of comparative study, will see daylight where the local observer, with his limited vision, flounders in darkness when he tries to work back and find the origin of some custom, now a mere relic of its former self.

● 115 In the collection of the information embodied in this paper, I have been greatly indebted to several intelligent natives who are employed in traversing the country from end to end, superintending the collection of the hut tax, and who, in pursuance of their duty, visit, during the course of the year, practically every village. These men, I found, took a great natural interest in enquiring into any strange rite or ceremony they incidentally met with in the course of their peregrinations. I have also encouraged chiefs and others whom I have met to talk of their beliefs, etc., and, in most cases, their usual reticence to discuss such matters with a European can soon be overcome.

[1] *Occasional Papers*, No. 1, "Eastern Uganda," by C. W. Hobley.

5: Hobley G-5 (ca. 1900) 1903 FL11 Luo FL11

I must also express my indebtedness to Mr. Mayon, Collector of Nandi, for much information regarding that tribe, which is particularly uncommunicative on these matters.

I have no doubt that, as years go by, many of the matters dealt with herein may become much clearer, but I have thought it best to publish the material without further delay, as it may help to stimulate further research, and I also fear that as civilization develops, many of the strange customs and legends may become lost; in fact, there are already signs that the younger generation of natives are losing interest in the old order of things.

LEGENDS OF THE ORIGIN OF THE JA-LUO RACE.

Many savage tribes have legends or myths to account for their origin, and I believe I am correct in stating that, in Africa, it is generally among those of Bantu origin that such myths are found. However, in the whole of the country in the vicinity of the east side of the Nyanza, with which I am fairly well acquainted, with one exception, no trace of a definite legend has been discovered among the Bantu tribes (the exception being the Kadimo belief that their common ancestor was a huge python). Among the Ja-Luo, however, there is a very wide-spread belief in one Apidtho, who was the Adam of the comparatively limited area of which these people have any cognizance.

I venture to give three versions of the same myth taken down from three chiefs living some forty miles apart. Each of these authorities also gave me a genealogical tree of considerable interest, inasmuch as they contain what may be a very probable solution of the origin of the names of the Ja-Luo tribes in Kavirondo. Of course there are discrepancies, but when one considers the way this story and the genealogical tables have been handed down verbally from generation to generation, one wonders that the three versions present so many features in common.

Version I from Ugulu chief of Uasheva.

Apidtho was the father of all the Kavirondo people. He descended from the heavens, and the day he reached the earth, the various kinds of animals also came down from above.

Apidtho descended on Ramogi, or Lamogi, Hill, a long way north of Ugando, and he afterwards died at the same place. He descended with one [illegible] whose name is forgotten, and by her he had two sons and four daughters. The sons were named Ramogi and Anyango, and each married two of his sisters.

Ramogi migrated southward, and came and settled on a hill in Kadimo country (near the mouth of the river Nzoia); this hill is called after him to this day. His offspring founded the Ja-Luo race; most of the names of his sons being the names of the various tribes which were founded by them.

Anyango, the other son of Apidtho, stayed in the country of his father and became the progenitor of the Baganda and Banyoro. On the day that Apidtho

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children that he had left a beautiful country in the heavens where the people were all bright like fire, and that when they were dead, they would all go and meet these people.

Ramogi, the great grandson of Apóthho, taught the Ja-Luo the custom of mixing cow's urine with the milk.

Mbonga, the eldest son of Ramogi, was the first member of the Ja-Luo to migrate southward into Kavirondo, and his brothers followed him; upon their arrival, they found the Bantu Kavirondo in possession of the land, but gradually drove them back.

The Bantu Kavirondo are descended from one Mugirango.

The Masai are descended from a Ja-Luo youth who, when out one day herding cattle, absconded into the woods, driving off the cattle; a woman who was lazy, and would not cultivate, crept away and joined him, and they became the progenitors of the Masai; they live by eating herbs and drinking milk to this day.

The Nandi and Lumbwa are descended from Alango, a son of Ramogi.

Rajoki, a son of Apóthho, is the ancestor of all the other people on earth, Europeans, etc.

This account was given me by an old chief living away in the hills to the south of Kavirondo Gulf, a man who has probably not seen half a dozen Europeans in the whole of his life. He told me that, in his youth, the old chiefs had many more legends, but the young men of to-day took but little interest in such things, and they were all rapidly being forgotten. He confided to me that his neighbours imputed to him the power of being able to transform himself at will into the shape of an ox and other animals, but he gravely assured me that these slanders were quite unfounded, and were a source of great embarrassment to him.

The version of the legend, given above, differs considerably from those previously recounted, and many new names appear. Most of the new names, however, are the names of tribes living in South Kavirondo, or Ugaya as it is often called, *e.g.*, Nyankago, Kalachonyo, Kalenjo, Kaloch, Kadem, Uchiong. As these were near neighbours of his ancestors, their names would be more likely to be remembered.

There is, I think, enough internal evidence to show that this is really a very ancient genealogy, brought down from the Nile valley by the people when they migrated to the south.

An examination of the three versions of the genealogy of the Ja-Luo just given will lay bare many discrepancies, the presence of which, to my mind, gives an air of great genuineness to the information, and is, in a way, proof of the age of the myth.

Like the genealogy of the Uganda kings given in Mr. Roscoe's paper,[1] and, for the matter of that, like many other genealogies of world-wide fame in the ancient history of more civilized countries, we have in the Ja-Luo genealogy a succession of mythical personages and demigods at one end of the line, and at the other end,

[1] *Journ. Anthrop. Inst.*, vol. xxxii, p. 25, "Further Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Baganda," Parts I and II.

8:Shaw G-5 (ca.1930)1932 FL11 Luo FL11

SOME PRELIMINARY NOTES ON LUO MARRIAGE CUSTOMS.

By K. C. Shaw.

I. Introductory.

This account of Luo marriage customs was given to me by half a dozen elders of the Luo tribe, living in a location called Nyahera about seven miles from Kisumu. All of them were over fifty, and two at least must have been nearing seventy, if they were not older. The question of the age of my informants may seem irrelevant, but in fact it is not. In the first place their advanced age, as age is counted among primitive people, entailed that they had been brought up, and had passed their early manhood during a period when the customs of the tribe had still not been affected by contact with European civilization. Their view of life, and of their duties as members of the Luo tribe was the view that had been taken by their fathers and their grandfathers before them. In this they differed from their own sons and grandsons whose attitude towards tribal customs has been and continues to be profoundly modified by white influences. This falling away from the traditional ways on the part of the younger generation is not only a source of grief to the old men: it is also a source of profound annoyance. For it robs them of a large part of the prestige and authority which among the Luo, as among other primitive people, is traditionally the due of those who attain to a ripe age. In the old days this prestige and this authority carried great weight. It was the head and fount of power in the tribe, and the exercise and enjoyment of this power became the chief interest of a man's life as his years increased and his sons grew up and took from his shoulders the family duties and cares of his earlier days. It follows that the decay in the importance of the old men, which is such a marked feature in nearly all the Kenya tribes to-day, makes the elders not only resentful, but also very willing to dwell on the old days, the good days, when their word was law, and the young were still in due subjection to the old and the wise. For these two reasons then, their exact personal knowledge of the traditional mode of life of the tribe, and their interest in the days when this mode of life was still the accepted one, the advanced age of my informants was a valuable factor. Also it pleased and flattered them to be appealed to as authorities, and from the beginning to the end of our intercourse they were only too pleased to tell me all they could of the days when they were young. Apart from a natural inclination to view the past through rosy spectacles they took great pains to give me an accurate account of what the tribal customs used to be before the white man came. Long discussions used to go on over points of detail, and it was only when they were all agreed that I was allowed

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●115 to write down the authorized version of whatever ceremonies it was
187 that I wished to describe. Moreover they warned me not only that customs differed slightly from clan to clan and location to location in North and Central Kavirondo, but that the Luo who had crossed the Gulf and gone to live in South Kavirondo differed in a good many ways from the Luo who had remained on the north side of the water. It must therefore be understood that the customs which I am about to describe are those of a group of Luo clans living in a small area in Central Kavirondo, and that there may be discrepancies between my account of these customs and those of other observers in other parts of the tribal area.

II. The Marriage Ceremony

582 In the old days, before the Europeans took over the government
221 of the Luo country, it seems that a man did not normally marry until he was nearer forty than thirty, and girls did not marry until they were nineteen or twenty. In the case of a man this delay was apparently connected with his duties as a warrior. It was considered that a man fought better if he were free from the ties of married life. Though the Luo were never a fighting tribe in the grand manner like the Masai they had for some hundreds of years been pressing southwards through the surrounding Bantu tribes. Raiding for fresh land or even for cattle alone, and the consequent reprisals on the part of the raided, played an important part in tribal life, and every able-bodied man from the age of seventeen or eighteen up to the time of his marriage had to hold himself in constant readi-
561 ness for a scrap. The term for a man of fighting age was *nyamar*,
885 that for a married man *jatit*, while that for a man who delayed to marry until much later than usual was *mwanda*. After marriage a man seems to have been exempt from all warlike duties and allowed to settle down and devote himself entirely to his family life.

582 It is likely that this postponement of marriage to a comparatively
583 late age was, apart from its connection with the defence of the tribe, an instance of the reluctance of the older men to surrender even a part of their wealth and power to their sons. A man could not marry without his father's permission, for it was only from his father (except under special circumstances into which I need not enter here) that he could obtain the cattle with which to acquire a bride, and primitive fathers are often no more anxious than some civilized ones to part with large quantities of their worldly goods for the benefit of their children. There was, however, no hard and fast convention as to the age at which a man might marry. Circumstances altered cases. A mother, for instance, who was without an unmarried daughter, and who wanted another woman to help her in the household work and cultivation, might insist that her son should bring a wife into the family, even if he had not yet reached ordinary marriageable age. Again if there